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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 000387

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2018

TAGS: PREL ETRD TH JA

SUBJECT: JAPAN WELCOMES DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENT  
IN THAILAND

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Japan welcomes the newly elected democratic government in Thailand and will work closely with the new government to strengthen bilateral ties, MOFA Principal Deputy Director told Embassy Tokyo on February 8. The return to power of a democratic government is a welcome change, but it is too early to assess the potential influence deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra might have on the new government, particularly following his expected return to Thailand in May. Japan hopes the new government will play an important role in ASEAN and in the Asia region as a whole.

¶2. (C) The new cabinet shows careful consideration for other parties, but Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej and his new cabinet are still closely linked with deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Kuwabara noted. It is interesting that Prime Minister Samak is concurrently serving as Defense Minister, Kuwabara stated. Japan will watch this change closely.

¶3. (C) It is too early to assess what impact, if any, the new government will have on Thailand's economic policy. Japan hopes it will implement a more open economic policy since Japan was concerned that the interim government's policy was restrictive. Finance Minister Surapong, a former doctor, is close to deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, but does not have much finance experience, so Japan is unsure what type of economic policy he will implement. Kuwabara wondered if the new government will lead to new efforts on behalf of the U.S. to establish a free trade agreement with Thailand.

SCHIEFFER